

Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2009
7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Muriel Esdale, Marianne Ferguson, Judy Fischbach, Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondschein, Sona Petrossian, and Susan Thomas

Commissioners absent/regrets:

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Dianne Chilingirian, Homer Franck, Samuel Glass, Nazik Kazimi, Norman Lazarus, Viviana Planine, Joan Rubin, and Frank Wolpe

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Carol Kelley, Matt McBride, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, David Rosen, and Susan Rosenthal

Advisory Students present: Julijana Englander and Hannah Konowitz

Students absent/regrets: Chloe Judell-Halfpenny and Hannah Yarmolinsky

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Ted Cullinane, Vincent Farina, Calyb Hare, Lily Konowitz, Noah Levenson, and Daniel O'Donoghue

The meeting opened at 7:32 pm and was chaired by Marianne Ferguson.

Introductions were made around the room and guests were welcomed.

School Updates:

Newton North High School –

Julijana reported on various activities and brought copies of program flyers.

- On 3/17/09 the Micro-credit Club held a daylong event examining microfinance.
- Over three days in April (4/6/09-4/8/09), NNHS held our HRC “Days of Remembrance” series of films and lectures to commemorate those who have died in a holocaust or genocide.
- The English Department held a lecture series in April featuring author and alumna Diana Spechler on 4/13/09 and poet/teacher Taylor Mali on 4/16/09.
- On 5/6/09 Freedom from Chemical Dependency presentations were held, including discussions on marijuana, alcohol, addiction and intervention.
- On 5/7/09 NNHS held a presentation on brain injuries and understanding other people’s needs.
- On 5/8/09 teachers were invited to bring students to the art rooms for NNHS Open Studios.
- On 5/22/09 and 5/29/09 NNHS seniors will be making presentations of their senior year projects.

Newton South High School –

Hannah reported on the various activities, and she and her sister Lily brought in copies of program flyers.

- April 27 through May 1 was our HRC “Days of Remembrance” exhibit and lectures with five speakers as detailed in the HRC minutes of 4/7/09.
- On 4/29/09 NSHS held a forum in which three of the four mayoral candidates shared their views and visions.
- On 5/6/09 the NSHS Conversations on Race Task Force and the Black Student Union screened *Scarred Justice: The Orangeburg Massacre 1968*. Filmmaker Judy Richardson attended and fielded students’ questions.
- On 5/7/09 Freedom from Chemical Dependency presentations were held, including discussions on marijuana, alcohol, addiction and intervention.
- On 5/22/09, the Invisible Children of Uganda documentary will be screened.
- During the week of 5/26/09-6/1/09 NSHS seniors in the Global Communities Program will present programs for Sustainability Week.

MINUTES

A motion to accept the 4/7/09 minutes was approved.

Hate Crimes/Incidents

Lt. Apotheker reported that there have been three hate incidents and one hate crime since the previous meeting.

- The crime was on 4/30/09, when an anti-Semitic and anti-gay note was left at NNHS.
- On 5/1/09, a swastika and the words "Heil Hitler" was found drawn on the city basketball court next to the Newton Community Service Center's Teen Center on Cherry Street.
- On 5/1/09, a swastika about 2 inches in size was found painted at the intersection of West St. and Green St.
- On 5/5/09 writing on the 2nd floor Goldrick House men's bathroom wall at NSHS said "Obama = Proof that Lincoln made a big mistake". The Principal notified all staff members and one teacher reported that "Impeach Obama" was written on a desk in a room near that bathroom. This is being investigated further.

Peter Brown inquired about the Israel/Palestine peace program that the HRC sponsored on 4/30/09, which was moved from the City Hall War Memorial Auditorium to the Newton Library Auditorium at the last minute. Lt. Apotheker noted that the Police had monitored websites and learned that protesters were coming to the event and that there were security issues involved. It was noted that there were only 2 or 3 protesters outside of the library. Nazik Kazimi asked about the costs of the metal detectors and the large police presence. Lt. Apotheker said that the detectors came from Boston College as part of a mutual sharing program. Jane Brown then asked whether metal detectors were ever used elsewhere in Newton, and Lt. Apotheker replied that they had been used at the Jewish Community Center.

Presentation

Peter Brown introduced Gunner Scott, the Director of the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC), who discussed the background and current efforts of MTPC.

The MTPC was founded in 2001 by groups around the state that worked to pass city ordinances in Boston, Cambridge, Amherst and Northampton. The mission of the MTPC is to end discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression. "Transgender" is the umbrella term for people who transition from birth sex to the gender they see themselves as.

Gunner discussed a bill currently in the legislature, "An Act Relative to Gender-Based Discrimination and Hate Crimes" (H 1728/ S 1687). This bill is co-sponsored by Representatives Scortiono and Rushing, and by Senator Downing. The bill provides explicit legal protections for transgender and gender non-conforming people by adding the terms "gender identity or expression" to the Commonwealth's already existing non-discrimination laws, which include public accommodations, credit, education, employment, and housing. In addition, the bill amends the definition of "hate crimes" to include crimes motivated by prejudice against a person's gender identity or expression.

Gunner then presented statistics showing gender identity/expression discrimination, particularly regarding employment and housing. The majority of people identifying themselves as transgender live below the poverty line. Presently, there is no mechanism for hate crime data collection on crimes against a person's gender identity/expression. If H 1728/ S 1687 passes, the police will have to collect that data.

Questions & Answers:

- Gunner was asked about the bill's history. The bill was originally introduced in 2007, but was tabled when time ran out.
- How do the Police learn about these issues? One way is that Gunner does trainings of Boston Police Cadets two times per year and will go wherever asked.
- When asked about the types of records that expose/out a person's sex, Gunner stated that both social security and birth records expose a person's sex.

In conclusion, Gunner asked the HRC to write letters of support for the bill to both Senator Creem and Representative O' Flaherty. For more information, the website address is www.masstpc.org, and Gunner can be contacted at gscott@masstpc.org or (617) 778-0519.

The HRC thanked Gunner for coming before the HRC and for this informative presentation.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Fair Housing

Sheila reported the Fair Housing Committee (FHC) is moving forward. She thanked those who attended the May 4 event: "Predatory Lending, Reverse Mortgages, and Fair Housing – In Newton and beyond". A new staff person will be starting in the Planning & Development Department in early June and will be focusing on fair housing issues.

Programs

Brenda will plan a program committee meeting in the near future to discuss ideas.

Jane reported that the HRC program, "Prospects for Peace between Israelis and Palestinians" was a successful, informative program. Nazik noted that the change of location was disruptive and 70 people had to be turned away. The reasons given for the location change were the lack of handicap access, problems with acoustics, and the threat of protest. Members discussed the event. Bev gave some clarifying facts, including logistical plans, that the library auditorium was at capacity with about 130 people, and that the Police agreed to allow others to come in as people left their seats. Sona noted that many people were waiting to take a seat as it was emptied, and that afterwards there were good conversations in the parking lot. Susan said she didn't think people learned anything new. Others disagreed. Viviana noted that it was helpful to have people sit together and share information. Nazik noted that we were told not to bring flyers but then flyers appeared that did not accurately portray Palestinians. Marianne ended the discussion noting that the program was excellent, describing it as a microcosm.

Education: Sona thanked the students for their work at the high schools to help organize the Days of Remembrance exhibits and lectures.

Communication/PR: Bev noted that we've done much outreach for all of the public programs we have been sponsoring, including regular calendar announcements to the media and a mailing of all event flyers to both our list of interested people and the religious institutions in Newton. Jane said her committee was part of the Mayor's press conference April 27 before the announcement of the change of location for that event.

Membership: There are a few openings for new members; all of those interested should talk to Muriel.

MAHRC (Mass. Association of Human Rights Commissions):

Peter reported he attended the May 8 meeting. They are not planning a major event yet given the economic uncertainties facing all the Commissions. Individually, the local Commissions are busy with many programs just as Newton is. The Mass. Office on Disability is still holding regional meetings about the state of civil rights in the Commonwealth.

Newton Clergy Association: No report was presented since the NCA is not holding meetings at this time.

Announcements:

On 5/19/09 HRC is co-sponsoring with the Needham Human Rights Commission and the Needham Free Public Library, an event with Aviva Chomsky, author of *They Take Our Jobs! and 20 other Myths about Immigration* at 7:30pm at the Needham Library. The discussion is open to the public and members are encouraged to attend.

On 5/20/09 the 35th annual Mayor's Community Prayer Breakfast will be at 7:30am at Boston College with guest speaker Lt. Governor Timothy Murray. This is a wonderful community event and members should tell Bev or Marianne if they are going.

On 5/16/09 the Attleboro Council on Human Rights has organized a program entitled "Celebration of Immigrants: Making a Home in America, Immigrants Past & Present." The program will take place at the Attleboro Arts Museum and will include speakers, ethnic food, and music.

Flyers and invitations for the above events were available to all attendees.

NEW OR OLD BUSINESS

Marianne asked for feedback on the bill dealing with transgender issues and hate crimes. Peter described his experience with MAHRC and urged the support of HRC. Dianne has researched the non-discrimination statutes for her class work and noted that "transgender" is not explicit. A majority of senators support the proposed legislation. Judy noted that it is crucial to support the law. **Marianne asked if there was consensus to support this legislation and members unanimously voted "yes."** Susan will visit the website, review the letters posted on the site, and draft a letter of support from the HRC.

Homer announced that a **Newton Palestinian Rights Committee** (NPRC) is being formed, and he read the statement of purpose.

Ted Cullinane, a 2004 graduate of NNHS, brought to the HRC's attention sub/urban Justice, which has a mission to equip youth living in and connected to the suburbs with the skills to transform their communities toward justice. Sub/Urban Justice works year-round in schools and communities throughout the Greater Boston area to provide young people with social justice education and organizing skills. There are various programs. Ted mentioned a six-week summer program this July and August for high school students. The program, which works on various human rights issues, is now in its third year. Each community develops its own action plan, and the program continues throughout the school year. For more information, call 617-492-5599 or visit www.suburbanjustice.org. The HRC thanked Ted for this information.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, June 10, 2009 at Newton City Hall Cafeteria.

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Droz, HRC staff director